

Testimony for the Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee

**SB 274 AN ACT REQUIRING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LEARN HERE, LIVE HERE PROGRAM.
HJ 68 ARESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO
PROVIDE TWO YEARS OF FREE PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
SB 273 AN ACT CONCERNING DEBT FREE COLLEGE**

Submitted by Patricia O'Neill, Ph.D., CSU-AAUP President, Associate Professor of Psychology,
Western Connecticut State University

Dear Representative Haddad, Senator Haskell, and Members of the Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

My name is Patricia O'Neill, Associate Professor of Psychology at WCSU, and President of the Connecticut State University-American Association of University Professors.

I urge your support for SB 274, An Act Requiring The Establishment of the Learn Here, Live Here Program.

Connecticut is dealing with a brain drain. Furthermore, our students already struggle with unwieldy amounts of debt. Home ownership after graduation is a dream that is out of reach for our students because, as we know, it is expensive to own a home in Connecticut. Help with saving towards a down payment on a first home would encourage our graduates to consider home ownership, which, in turn, would increase the likelihood that our graduates remain in Connecticut, contributing to the state. A program that could increase the likelihood that our graduates remain in Connecticut is worthy of support.

I also urge support of HJ 68, Resolution Proposing An Amendment to the State Constitution to Provide Two Years of Free Public Post-Secondary Education.

The evidence is clear: individuals with at least an associates degree earn significantly more over their lifetimes compared to those with less than associates degree. Individuals with at least a bachelor's degree earn more in comparison to those with an associates. Yet not all our residents are able to complete either an associates or a bachelors. There are many obstacles on the way to completion, and probably the biggest one is money. Our public higher education institutions are reasonably priced, but still remain out of reach for too many, who then may be forced to take on debt, which in turn hobbles them after graduation. Two years of free education would go a long way towards eliminating some of the obstacles our students face. Enshrining such an opportunity in the Constitution would make Connecticut a leader in public higher education.

Finally, I will reluctantly comment on SB 273 An Act Concerning Debt-Free College. While I support this bill, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that excluding prospective Connecticut State University students from this is problematic, and poses a threat to the CSUs.

Thank you for your time.